On Improving North American LGBTQ students' Well-being at School

by

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Abstract

Sexual minority groups begin to attract public attention in recent years because of a more civilized world which pays great attention to educational equity and multiculturalism. Compared to their heterosexual peers, LGBTQ youth are at higher risk to suffer from harassment and victimization at school, leave school without permission, abuse substances, and have suicidal attempts. Although there are serious programs and activities aimed to help LGBTQ students, the outcome is still not yet ideal due to all kinds of barriers encountered by educators in the helping process. It is high time that we figured out some feasible methods to help educators to combat these obstacles in order to better serve the needs of LGBTQ youth.

keywords: LGBTQ youth, educational equity, at-risk students, peer victimization

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Chapter 1 — Introduction

With the rapid development of a highly-civilized society which emphasizes a lot on social justice and diversity, the topics on minority groups begin to appear in public vision on a large scale. The "hidden" sexual minority groups—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) people—has attracted growing attention in the past several decades (Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Quinn & Meiners, 2011).

When browsing some news which is related to LGBTQ groups on social networking, I can always find many annoying and ridiculous comments which indicate the public's great misunderstandings and ignorance of LGBTQ groups and these drive me to go deeper in this area. Another reason for me to choose "LGBTQ" as my research topic is because that when doing the overview of the 10-year articles of journal *Educational Researcher*, I found some very interesting articles which are related to LGBTQ groups and they provoked my further interest in this topic. Apart from these, I happened to know some very nice people who "belong to" LGBTQ groups, so I also want to understand them better through doing this research.

The main theoretical perspectives used in my thesis is *queer theory* which can be understood from three dimensions: queer as a noun, queer as an adjective, and queer as a verb.

Queer

Queer describes people whose sexuality and/or gender fall outside of cultural criteria and boundaries of gender and sexuality (Morris, 1998). Specifically, those who identify as

queer are people whose behaviors and identities do not fit the common definitions of maleness (show masculinity, are attracted to women) or femaleness (show femininity, are attracted to men) (Morris, 1998). Apart from this, we should notice that the norms of sexuality and gender not only refer to sexual orientation, they also include areas like sexual behavior, gender expression, and forms of intimate relationship.

Queer Theory

The term "queer theory" dates back to a 1990 conference held by Teresa deLauretis. She sought out methods to disrupt her complacency of LGBT studies by saying that the field needed to "queer" the heteronormative underpinnings (Halperin, 2003). Queer, as a theory, interrogates how behaviors of sexuality are normalized. Queer theorists argue that the generation of criteria and norms of sexuality navigate identity and behavior like law and church did previously (Britzman, 1995; Butler, 2004; Dilley, 1999). When a term like "heterosexual" receives a set of attributes which define what is acceptable for society, it is no longer a simple word, it gradually becomes a standard that enables an individual to assess and monitor themselves and others. The standard is reinforced when sexual identities and behaviors against and with the normal heterosexual are consistently referred. Binaries used to define concepts like masculine/feminine and heterosexual/homosexual contribute to the production of norms. Queer theorists argue that these boundaries are problematic because they reinforce the definition of "normal" without considering the overlap between categories or identities that are not represented in the paradigm. Using queer theory is to check what is regarded as normal, how the norms are produced, and how they influence individuals and

institutions (Schmidt, 2010).

I have never thought that LGBTQ could be a topic in the educational field. However, the truth is that it is very important topic as there are many educational inequities related to LGBTQ identification. It is a matter of multicultural education and social justice. Despite the fact that the visibility, recognition, and legal advances for LGBTQ individuals are increasing (Gallup, 2010; Saad, 2007), conflicts surrounding gender identity and sexual orientation persist in North American society. These conflicts are reflected in schools which continue to try hard to create safer and more supportive educational environment for LGBTQ students (Espelage, Aragon, Birkett, & Koenig, 2008; McCabe & Rubinson, 2008).

Previous research have pointed out that sexual minority youth—(LGBTQ)—tend to have negative psychological and educational outcomes in a higher frequency than do their straight peers (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; Elze, 2007; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2011). Compared with their heterosexual peers, youth who define themselves as LGBTQ tend to experience greater risk of suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts, victimization by peers, and a higher level of truancy or unexcused absences from school (Robinson & Espelage, 2011). LGBTQ adolescents also experience a higher level of substance abuse and homeless (Stroul, 2007).

In a longitudinal study, researchers found that homophobic victimization lead to higher ratings of depression and anxiety, and lower degrees of school belongings and higher levels of suicidality among LGBTQ identified students (Poteat et al., 2011). Other research has indicated that students, including LGBTQ students, should all enjoy the right to learn in a

school environment free from persecutions (Szalacha, 2003). Students need to have a sense of belonging from school and identify the school as a supportive community, which protects their individuality and cares about their mental and physical health (Bidwell, 1987; Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Coleman, 1987; Lightfoot, 1978; Lipsitz, 1984; Young, 1990). Schools must recognize and address the extra stresses confronted by sexual minority youth (Hunter & Schaecher, 1995). According to this saying, efforts should be made by LGBTQ students, educators as well as researchers to resist oppressive practices in school and to create a safe school climate for LGBTQ youth.

In order to address the difficulties encountered by LGBTQ students as well as find strategies to support LGBTQ youth, researchers have begun to explore the sociocultural environment in which LGBTQ youth live, such as school, families, and communities (Horn, Kosciw, & Russell, 2009). Among these, schools receive great attention because school-based victimization towards LGBTQ youth has persisted over time (Toomey & Russell, 2013). Growing efforts have been made to find and implement strategies that may establish a supportive and safe school environment for LGBTQ youth (Horn, Kosciw, & Russell, 2009). Measures including anti-bullying policies, gay-straight alliances, and supportive teachers have been provided to combat the homophobic harassment towards LGBTQ youth.

Critical Statistics

The national school climate survey has consistently documented unsafe school climate for many LGBTQ students (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010). The latest 2015 school climate survey (the survey is conducted every two years, and the outcome of

2017 climate survey will not be released until 2018 fall) conducted among 10,528 students aged 13 to 21 years old shows that 85.2% of LGBTQ students experience verbal harassment at school because of personal characteristics, gender expression (54.5%), and sexual orientation (70.8%). 27% of LGBTQ students are physically harassed over the last year due to their sexual orientation and 20.3% due to their gender expression. 48.6% of LGBTQ students experience cyber-bullying in the past year because of their sexual orientation or gender expression. 59.6% of LGBTQ students are sexually harassed over the past year. 57.6% of LGBTQ students who experience harassment or assault in school do not report it to school personnel because they think there wowill not be effective intervention or the situation may become even worse after reporting it (Kosciw et al., 2015).

Apart from the above alarming statistics, the reaction from school in response to the harassment received by LGBTQ students is frustrating. 63.5% of the students who report the harassment or assault say that school personnel do nothing in response or they just tell the students to neglect it. While suffering from the harassment or assault from their classmates, LGBTQ students also experience the unkind attitude of school administrators. The 2015 school climate survey shows that 66.2% of LGBTQ students experience LGBTQ-related discriminatory practices or policies at school. 29.8% of students report being punished for public displays of affection that are not punished among non-LGBTQ students. 16.7% of students are prohibited from writing about or discussing LGBTQ topics in assignments. 15.6% of students are prohibited from participating a dance or function with someone of the same sex. 14.1% of students are prevented from promoting or forming a gay-straight alliance.

13.2% of students are restricted from wearing items or clothing supporting an LGBTQ groups. 10.8% are prevented from participating in school sports because they are LGBTQ (Kosciw et al., 2015).

The school climate survey further shows the harmful effects of a hostile school climate on LGBTQ students' mental and physical health. LGBTQ students who experience a higher level of victimization because of sexual orientation are more than triple as likely to miss school in the past 30 days than those who experienced lower levels (62.2% vs. 20.1%). They also have lower GPA (2.9 vs. 3.3) as well as lower self-esteem, school belonging and higher levels of depression (Kosciw et al., 2015).

The implementation situation of LGBTQ-related school resources such as gay-straight alliances and LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum are also included in this report. 54% of students say that their school has a GSA or other similar student clubs. Most LGBTQ students report that they have participated in school GSA at some level, 34% of LGBTQ students have not. The report shows a positive effect of these resources: students who have GSA in their school are less likely to hear "gay" used in a negative way compared with those who do not have a GSA in their school (59.3% compared to 77.1%). They are less likely to feel unsafe because of their sexual orientation than those who do not have GSA in their schools. They also experience lower levels of victimization related to their gender expression or sexual orientation (Kosciw et al., 2015).

To sum up, varieties of LGBTQ youth suffer from peer victimization at school including physical, verbal and relational forms of victimization (Coker, Austin, & Schuster,

2010; Espelage et al., 2008; Poteat, O'Dwyer, & Mereish, 2012; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). Numerous detrimental outcomes of peer victimization have been examined, such as depression, anxiety, suicidal attempt (D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002; Espelage et al., 2008; Poteat et al., 2011; Robinson & Espelage, 2011), and substance abuse (Marshal et al., 2008; Russell, Sinclair, Poteat & Koenig, 2012). Peer victimization and homophobic language towards LGBTQ youth lead to lowered mental and academic performance of LGBTQ youth (Poteat et al., 2011; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). Heterosexist school policies in combination with the aforementioned peer victimization and homophobic teasing as well as the neglecting of students' homophobic behavior by school staff contribute to the mental and academic concerns of LGBTQ youth (Poteat et al., 2011; Robinson & Espelage, 2011). We can further find out from the aforementioned statistics that although some schools try hard to create a safer school climate for LGBTQ students through creating gay-straight alliances and incorporating LGBTQ topics into the curriculum, the outcome is still unsatisfying and more than half of the schools fail to put the efforts in place. It is high time that educators and researchers keep addressing LGBTQ education issues in order to strive for the benefit of LGBTQ groups. As we can see from the 2015 school climate survey report, some schools may even implement policies that are against LGBTQ students, including preventing LGBTQ students from establishing a GSA. These policies contribute to the negative experience for LGBTQ students and make them feel as if they are not valued and accepted by their school communities. I feel it is of great significance to conduct research on LGBTQ groups and bring this sexual minority groups to the centre of the stage.

I used the keywords "LGBTQ," "homosexuality," "program," "curriculum," "anti-bullying," "queer," and "diversity" to search for the related materials in ERIC database and the electronic library of China's Academy of Social Sciences. I also find reading materials in Journal of LGBTQ youth.

My project aims to introduce the status quo of general LGBTQ groups with an emphasis on school-aged LGBTQ individuals of North America.

Chapter 2 — Literature Review

The following chapter 2 of my project is divided into the following sections: 1) LGBTQ identification and falsehood; 2) LGBTQ issues in education; 3) Barriers encountered by educators in helping LGBTQ youth; 4) Attempts made to help LGBTQ students and some implications for the future; 5) LGBTQ literature—help people know more about LGBTQ groups; 6) Other issues.

LGBTQ Identification and Falsehood

Misunderstandings surrounding homosexuality are often aggravated by biased images associated with sexual orientations shaped through media channels (Besner & Spungin, 1995). Gay people are often regarded as unable to sustain long-term relationships, addicted to fashion, banal, and always presenting womanish characteristics (Barret & Logan, 2002). Lesbians have been thought to be vicious as witches, hooligan or tomboys with masculine characteristics (Barret & Logan, 2002). Bisexual and transgendered people are demonized as freakish (Zamani-Gallahe & Choudhuri, 2011). The several common misunderstandings about LGBTQ groups are listed as follows:

Being LGBTQ is just a choice. One of the most common misunderstandings about LGBTQ people is that being LGBTQ is just a choice. This misconception is most deeply believed by adolescents. To them, LGBTQ groups are regarded as confused and misguided for experiencing a sexual attraction to people of the same-sex, both sexes, or for identifying themselves as a gender which is different from the one assigned to them when they were born (Ziomek- Diagle, Black, & Kocet, 2007). However, over 3 decades of researchers have drawn

the same conclusion: being LGBTQ is an identity, not a choice. It is explained that similar to their heterosexual peers, LGBTQ youth become aware of their gender identity and sexual orientation and experience conflicts while trying hard to maintain connections with parents and their heterosexual peers (Burton & Lothwell, 2012).

LGBTQ youth are easy to identify. LGBTQ youth are easy to identify among their heterosexual peers is another commonly held misunderstandings around LGBTQ youth. For example, men who demonstrate behaviors that are ascribed to women by the culture are labeled as "gay." Similarly, women who demonstrate behaviors that are ascribed to men by culture are labeled as "lesbian" (Abreu, McEachem, & Kenny, 2016). As research shows, sexual identity refers to how one identifies oneself in terms of whom one is or is not socially, psychologically, emotionally and physically. Sexual identity is not determined by gender expression. Gender expression and gender identity can overlap, but they are two different concepts. An individual's gender expression does not necessarily indicate the person's sexual and gender identity (Killermann, 2014; Parrott, 2009).

LGBTQ should keep their feelings to themselves. Some people held the belief that school climate will be much better if LGBTQ youth can keep their gender identity and sexual orientation as a secret to themselves (Marszalek & Logan, 2014). This misunderstanding neglects the existence of LGBTQ groups and creates non-inclusive school climate (Abreu, McEachem, & Kenny, 2016). Non-inclusive school environment will do great harm to LGBTQ physical and mental health (Ryan et al., 2015).

The above misunderstandings of LGBTQ groups harm the emotional feeling and

welfare of LGBTQ groups as well as confuse their self-identification and self-definition process. The sense of personal identification and affirmation are key parts of development (Arnett, 2006; Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010). This is particularly true when it comes to marginalized groups such as LGBTQ groups (Zamani-Gallaher & Choudhuri, 2011).

Rieger, Linsenmeier, Gygax, and Bailey (2008) found that, compared with straight individuals, gay peers demonstrated remarkably more gender noncompliance behaviors in their earlier home videos (they were 4-5 years old in their home videos). However, the average age of self-consciousness of homosexual attraction happens later at about 10 or 11 years old, whereas the average age of non-heterosexual self-identification ranges between 14 and 16 years old (D' Augelli, 1998; D' Augelli & Hershberger, 1993; Herdt & Boxer, 1993; Rosario, Rotheram-Borus, & Reid, 1996; Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2000). Kosciw (2011) holds the opinion that adolescence is a period of great concern for the development of LGBTQ youth, as many individuals in America start to establish a sense of their gender identity and/or sexuality during this period of their lives.

The concept of "identity" has posed many challenges to educators and researchers who conduct surveys on LGBTQ adolescents and emerging adults. Identity is hard to define and challenging to measure (Korchmaros, Powell, & Stevens, 2013). As Espelage (2008) pointed out, school administrator and parents are often not willing to ask youth direct questions regarding their sexual orientation, and on the other hand, youth often waver in labeling themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual. With the realization that society may be hostile to LGBTQ groups, to a great extent, LGBTQ individuals are assigned identities

passively rather than actively position themselves into different categories.

Although the identifying process of LGBTQ groups is complicated, it is still an ideal place to get started. As has been said, "self-definition is a matter of self-determination and social justice..." (Burdge, 2007, p. 243). According to this opinion, space should be created for LGBTQ youth to explore, self-define, and self-identify their identity rather than let them choose between identity labels and existing categories which are socially constructed (Wagaman, 2016). How one identifies oneself determines how they react to certain behaviors and languages thus determines how they understanding the whole world. Self-identification by LGBTQ groups as the internal process of identifying primary LGBTQ groups should be paid great attention. A better understanding of how LGBTQ self-define their identity would connect societal and individual approaches to help LGBTQ youth (Wagaman, 2016).

Knowing that adolescents in school may not yet claim LGBTQ-related identities, various methods have been used to identify primarily LGB youth, including asking categorical questions about students' sexual behaviors, sexual attractions and sexual preference on the basis of related surveys (Korchmaros, Powell, & Stevens, 2013). Identity scales including categories like heterosexual, usually heterosexual, bisexual, usually homosexual, homosexual/lesbian/gay, and uncertain are used in some studies (lmeida, Johnson, Corliss, Molnar, & Azrael, 2009).

Some forms of identification actually indicate another key point in understanding the general umbrella LGBTQ identity—LGB focus on sexual orientations whereas TQ focus on gender identity (Wagaman, 2016). This reminded me of one person I met in Toronto in 2012.

She is a man who later transgendered into a woman then she married another woman. I was quite confused at that time because I thought he tried hard to become a woman because he wanted to marry a man. I was stuck with the "common" sexual orientation. I neglected that these were totally two separate affairs. He transgendered into a woman because his physiological gender was contrary to his psychological gender. She married a woman because she is homosexual.

Identity classification set up artificial binaries, despite the truth that people often exist or shift between several categories. Using critical theories such as feminist and queer theories enables us to verify the availability of binaries and to look for resistance and transformation outside an existing exemplification (Wagaman, 2016).

As has been mentioned above, self-identification of LGBTQ groups actually determines how they treat the outside world, to a certain degree. To extend this saying, while LGBTQ groups is influenced by the surrounding world, they are also exerting their own influences on the world in the meantime.

Under the theoretical framework of queer theory, there is a term "queer world-making" that emphasizes the dynamic processes of establishing and identifying queer or LGBTQ identities in ways which are intended to influence the social environment (Duong, 2012). As mentioned by Wagaman (2016), another important factor should be highlighted when thinking about the identification of LGBTQ groups—the real lives of LGBTQ individuals, including their experiences and discourses—then we can have a better understanding of the meaning they attach to their LGBTQ-specific identities and in what way

did those identities both sculptured by as well as shaping their surrounding world.

To sum up, the identification of LGBTQ groups remains a complicated process. Considerable inconsistency can be seen in the existing literature when it comes to defining which adolescents fall within this population (Wagaman, 2016). All the existing literature are problematic in some way. An ideal way to identify LGBTQ groups still needed to be explored.

LGBTQ Issues in Education

School climate. The phrase "school climate" appeared in LGBTQ literature, it refers to the well-being and safety of LGBTQ students at school as well as the degree to which school administrator implement policies and programs trying to help support LGBTQ students (Snapp et al, 2015). School climate has multiple meanings in educational research and scholars use it differently to refer the interactions between students and teachers or policy conditions of school or organizational structures (Anderson, 1982). School climate is often measured through self-reported statistics on individual experiences (Eliot et al., 2010). Experiences such as victimization or learning about LGBTQ issues reported by LGBTQ students represent discrete incidents that happened in school. Such incidents have high variability among students, thus great attention should be paid to events taking place at individual student level (Snapp et al., 2015).

Mufioz-Plaza, Quinn, and Rounds (2002, p. 63) described the classroom as "the most homophobic of all social institutions." Such homophobic school environments cause bad consequences to LGBTQ students, including repulsion, physical victimization, verbal

harassment/abuse, poor academic performance, school dropout, school failure, and decreased participation in school courses and extracurricular activities (Chesir-Teran & Hughes, 2009; Jorden et al., 1997; Kosciw, Greytak & Diaz, 2009). Furthermore, Kosciw et al (2010) found that approximately 34% of LGBTQ youth received no response after reporting a homophobic incident. What is more, some teachers not only fail to provide a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ youth but also contribute to the victimization of LGBTQ students (Sadowski, 2010). Generally speaking, LGBTQ students often hold more pessimistic attitudes towards school (Espelage et al., 2008; Russell, Seif, & Truong, 2011). Issues encountered by LGBTQ students can be mainly divided into several sections: harassment, truancy, suicidal ideation and suicide attempts.

Harassment. Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, and Bartkiewicz (2010) report that 84.6% of LGBTQ students received verbal assaults, and 40.1% reported being physically harassed in the past year due to their sexual orientation (Kosciw, Greytak, Diaz, & Bartkiewicz, 2010). It is well recorded that "LGBTQ students are frequently harassed and bullied in schools and that such harassment often goes unchecked" (Marshall & Hernandez, 2012, p. 89).

Verbal harassment is less obvious than other forms of harassment and is demonstrated through anti-gay jokes and anti-gay words or ridicules towards LGBTQ groups (Fredman, Schultz, & Hoffman, 2013). Terms like *faggot, dyke, and sissy* and sentences like "that's so gay" and "don't be such a fag" are examples of verbal harassment experienced by gay and lesbian in their adolescent years (Meyer, 2009; Marshall & Hernandez, 2012). In a 2008 middle and high school LGBTQ survey conducted by GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and

Straight Education Network), 91.4% of LGBTQ youth claimed that they frequently heard aforementioned homophobic language in school. Of these youth, 99.4% reported that they heard such languages from their peers while 63% said they heard such languages from school staff (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008). A study of more than 200,000 California students shows that 75.5% of LGBTQ students reported being harassed in the past year because they were "gay or lesbian or someone thought they were" (O'Shaughnessy, Russell, Heck, Calhoun, & Laub, 2004, p. 3). A 2007 school climate survey conducted by GLSEN among 6209 students aging from 13 years old to 21 years old in America shows that 36% of LGBTQ students received physical harassment and assaults, often with a weapon (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008). A 2011 American school climate survey which is conducted among 8,584 students ranges between 13 and 20 years old shows that 84.9% of LGBTQ students heard the word "gay" used negatively. 91.4% said that they felt uncomfortable hearing this kind of language. 61.4% heard negative languages related to gender expression. 56.9% said they heard homophobic remarks from school staff and their teachers. 81.9% of the investigated students were verbally abused in the previous 12 months due to their sexual orientation and gender expression. 38.3% received physical harassments and 18.3% received physical assaults in the previous 12 months due to their sexual orientation or gender expression (GLSEN, 2011).

Under such an unsafe school environment where both LGBTQ students' teachers and their heterosexual peers contribute to destroy LGBTQ students' confidence and hurt their emotional feelings, school life becomes a suffering experience for LGBTQ students.

Truancy. Truancy or absence from school without approval is a significant issue to educators (Aragon, Poteat, Espelage, & Koenig, 2008). Gastic (2008) indicated that being frequently harassed is connected with increased levels of truancy. A 2003 survey indicates that high school students in Massachusetts who defined themselves as LGB were almost five times as likely as their straight peers to report not attending school for safety concerns (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2004). A 2009 nationwide survey conducted by GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network) shows that many LGBT students feel forced to be absent from school for a couple of classes or entire days because of the hostile school environment where they experience frequent harassment. 29.1% of LGBT students missed a class at least once in the past month because of the unsafe and uncomfortable school atmosphere while this statistic of their straight peers is 8.0%. 30.0% of LGBT students skipped at least one whole day of school in the past month for safety and emotional concerns while this statistic of their straight peers is 6.7%. Kosciw (2011) indicates that LGBTQ students who suffered from higher levels of harassment because of their sexual orientation were nearly three times as likely to have skipped school classes in the previous month than those who experienced relatively lower levels (57.9% vs. 19.6%).

Suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Stressful school climate exerts a negative influence on the mental health of many LGBTQ students (Meyer, 2003). A study shows that the prevalence of psychological disorders among LGBTQ youth was higher than what is indicated in a national sample (Mustanski, Garofalo, & Emerson, 2010). Many researchers indicate that suicide among the LGBTQ population is a major mental health concern. Verbal

and physical harassment received by LGBTQ adolescents resulted in high levels of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts as well as actual suicides among this population. It is found that in 2005, 45% of LGBTQ youth attempted suicide, compared with 8% of their heterosexual peers (Espelage et al., 2008). One study shows that nearly 22% of bisexual adolescents and 20% of gay and lesbian youth try to kill themselves at least once in the past 1 year, compared with 4% of their straight peers (Hatzenbuehler, 2011). An international population-based study of adolescents shows that during their lifetime, bisexual men or gay were four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers. Lesbian or bisexual women were twice as likely as the straight woman to try to kill themselves (King et al., 2008). The aforementioned statistics are alarming, but hopefully we still can do something to change this situation—to create a good school climate for LGBTQ students. As the study shows that a positive school climate can serve to buffer against the negative psychological experience among sexual minority youth (Espelage et al., 2008).

After a brief demonstration of the issues encountered by LGBTQ students in school. Barriers in helping LGBTQ adolescents and possible solutions to address their difficulties will then be analyzed as follows:

Barriers Encountered by Educators in Helping LGBTQ Adolescents

The significance of having supportive educators to help create safe school climates for LGBTQ students cannot be overstated. Studies indicate that a positive school climate can definitely help improve the academic performance and mental health of LGBTQ students (Espelage et al., 2008; Kosciw et al., 2010; Murdock & Bolch, 2005). Teachers should be

responsible for creating an inclusive classroom atmosphere to help LGBTQ students adapt to school life (Puchner & Klein, 2011). A research suggests that the inclusion of curriculum that reflects histories and lives of LGBTQ people can help improve school climate for LGBTQ youth (Russell et al, 2010). Over the past decades, researchers have constantly argued that LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum can help create a fair and safe school environment for all students (Burdge et al, 2013; Kosciw et al, 2012; Quinn & Meiners, 2011; Russell et al, 2010; Snapp et al, 2015). When schools provide LGBTQ inclusive curricula, students report a higher degree of safety, hear fewer homophobic language and suffered from less harassment (Kosciw et al., 2010; O' Shaughnessy et al., 2004; Russell et al., 2006). LGBTQ-inclusive curricula let LGBTQ youth receive more support from their heterosexual peers, 67% of LGBTQ students saying their classmates accept LGBTQ students when their schools teach LGBTQ-inclusive curricula (Kosciw et al., 2012). The report finds that heterosexual students reduce their prejudices against LGBTQ people when they are exposed to a positive or neutral portrayal of LGBTQ people (Fuentes et al., 2012). A research shows that LGBTQ students who have an inclusive curriculum in their schools are less likely to skip classes in the past month compared to those who do not have an inclusive curriculum (18.6% vs. 35.6%) (Kosciw et al., 2015). They are also less likely to think that they might not graduate from high school (1.4% vs. 4.1%) and less likely to not plan to pursue post-secondary education (5.1% vs. 7.0%) (Kosciw et al., 2015). What is more, LGBTQ students who have an inclusive curriculum in their schools report that they feel more connected to their school community than those who do not have this curriculum (Kosciw et al., 2015). Despite the obvious

advantages of an LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum, no more than 20% of LGBTQ students report being exposed to positive LGBTQ figures in the classroom (Kosciw et al., 2012). Physical education is regarded as extremely unsafe space for LGBTQ youth wherein verbal abuse is common and the need of transgender students is not met (Snapp et al., 2015). Courses such as sexuality education also do not include information that supports LGBTQ youth (Kosciw et al., 2012; McGarry, 2013).

Similarly, although educational field full of discussions concerning heteronormativity as it links with gay-straight alliances (Griffin et al., 2003; Lee, 2002), anti-bullying policies/homophobia (Espelage et al., 2008; Russ et al., 2008), teaching practices (Franck, 2002), curricula planning (Sumara & Davies, 1999). There is little educational research conducted on the incorporation of LGBTQ topics into curricula (Maguth & Taylor, 2014). Although Thornton (2003) calls for the incorporation of LGBTQ topics into the social studies curricula, researchers and practitioners have done little on this topic. Thornton (2003) argues that few social studies materials deal with LGBTQ history and issues; it is as if LGBTQ groups does not exist. The incorporation of LGBTQ topics will not only reduce the harmful influence of heteronormativity but will also create a more accurate reading of the world in which all students live. It is argued that all students should have the right to see themselves in the curriculum and avoid the "blank space" that can occur with LGBTQ groups (Maguth & Taylor, 2014).

Although the importance of the incorporation of LGBTQ topics is acknowledged by the public, the actual situation is not yet ideal in terms of LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum. A

climate survey conducted by GLSEN in 2015 shows that only 22.4% of LGBTQ students are taught positive images about LGBT people, history or event in schools. 17.9 are even taught negative content about LGBTQ issues. 42.4% of LGBTQ students say that they can find resources about LGBTQ-related issues in their school libraries. Nearly half or LGBTQ students report being able to access LGBT-related information online via school computers (Kosciw et al., 2015).

Some studies indicate that school staff has insufficient preparation and knowledge to work effectively with LGBTQ students (Savage, Prout, & Chard, 2004; Whitman, Horn, & Boyd, 2007). Researchers suggest that LGBTQ topics are seldom incorporated into formal school curriculum (Crocco, 2008; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Sadowski, 2008; Thornton, 2002, 2003). Lots of teachers are not feeling well-prepared to incorporate topics which are related to LGBTQ issues into their curriculum syllabus (Meyer, 2009; Ngo, 2003). This feeling is partially due to the pressures from students' parents and school administrator, the fear of being regarded as gay themselves, lack of relative support and an already heavy workload. (MacGillivray, 2000; Meyer, 2009). Some teachers encountered religious resistance and feel constrained by content when trying to include LGBTQ topic in their curricula. Another reason for teachers to avoid discussions of LGBTQ topic such as same-sex marriage is that they want to protect LGBTQ adolescents from the possible unkind comments made by other students. (Hess, 2002, 2009b; Levinson, 2012). They worry that such controversial topic could probably lead to dismissive and intolerant comments (Calmes & Baker, 2012). Educators also face the potential risk comes from some political decisions which may

influence their inclusions of LGBTQ topics in schools. For example, the 2006 Garcetti v. Ceballos decision determines that public employees are no longer citizens that under the protection of the First Amendment when they are delivering a speech which is related to their jobs (Salkin, 2010). I assume that this decision makes American public employees such as teachers dare not to include some risky elements in their curriculum such as LGBTQ topics because they are positioned in a potentially dangerous place where risk can befall them at any time due to the content of their speech.

In order to combat the aforementioned fact that teachers do not dare to include LGBTQ topics in their curriculum, Maguth & Taylor (2014) suggest ways to incorporate LGBTQ topics by: allowing students to conduct an investigation on LGBTQ-related topics, doing substantive research, and reflecting on their own research from a critical perspective. These practices enable students to understand issues surrounding LGBTQ people and critically reflect on how they are associated with heteronormativity.

A research shows that teachers are more likely to help LGBTQ students when the school where they work provide active gay-straight alliances and anti-bullying policies as well as training specifically related to LGBTQ youth (Swanson & Gettinger, 2016). According to this, school administrators should use initiatives in organizing GSA and enact supportive policies as well as train teachers in order to better serve LGBTQ youth. Teachers play a critical role in contributing to the well-being of LGBTQ youth as studies show that support from peers and parents, although very important, cannot attenuate the damaging influences of a negative school climate to the degree that help from teachers do (Craig &

Smith, 2014; Murdock & Bolch, 2005).

Some studies have explored how LGBT teachers and heterosexual teachers behave differently in gender and sexual diversity (GSD)- inclusive education. Interestingly, there are three quite different outcomes. Schneider and Dimito's study (2008) found no difference between heterosexual and LGBT teachers when it comes to their involvement in GSD-inclusive education: both groups pay more attention to unkind reactions from students and parents than from administrators and colleagues.

In contrast to this study, Meyer (2008) suggested in a small-scale interview research that teachers are strongly affected by their own sexual identity as well as by personal experiences of assaults and marginalization due to other identity differences. In further contrast to Schneider and Dimito's study (2008), Wright and Smith (2013) found that straight teachers were more likely than LGBTQ teachers to intervene in homophobic bullying because straight teachers are not restrained by perceived risks involved.

While educators seem to realize the difficulties and challenges faced by LGBTQ students and endeavor to manage students' homophobic language, most teachers claim that they almost always avoid LGBTQ topics in their classrooms (Salkin, 2010).

Attempts Made to Help LGBTQ Students and Some Implications for the Future

As has been mentioned above, some research has recorded a heightened level of academic and mental risk for LGBTQ students. Supportive programs are in great need to help create a safe school climate for LGBTQ students. GLSEN cooperates with organizations like the Advertising Council to develop programs such as the "ThinkB4YouSpeak" movement

trying to help raise the awareness of some anti-LGBTQ language which is often used unconsciously without intent to be hurtful or negative. These unintended languages can also produce potential negative outcomes. Other initiatives such as the "It Gets Better Project" draws attention from popular culture and urges scholars to seek to understand the experiences of LGBTQ students (Russell, 2015).

Other helpful organizations such as GSAs (Gay-Straight Alliances) are very common in high schools and colleges. GSAs are intended to create safe school climates for heterosexual youth and LGBTQ students to socialize with each other to gain support. (Griffin, Lee, Waugh, & Beyer, 2004; Russell & McGuire, 2008; Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, Aarti, & Laub, 2009). For example, members of GSAs can give emotional support to peers suffering from struggling experience. GSAs can provide opportunities for their members to lead and develop initiatives to address the unequal phenomena in communities or schools (Griffin et al., 2004). GSAs are highly youth-driven organizations which can help youth gain leadership experience by leading school or even community campaigns like Ally Week (GLSEN, 2012).

One research conducted in 33 Massachusetts schools indicated that LGBTQ students and their heterosexual peers in schools with GSAs program reported a more safe and positive school atmosphere than those in schools without the setting of GSAs (Szalacha, 2003). Although GSAs seem definitely have a positive impact on the well-being of LGBTQ youth, there are very limited studies which actually verified such impact (Szalacha, 2003).

Mental health support is also provided to LGBTQ students in middle school, high

school, and college. However, it is indicated that LGBTQ students were 25% more preferred to chat with a teacher rather than with a psychological professional about assaults and harassments they suffered in school (Kosciw et al., 2010). This is not hard to understand, because when talking to a psychological professional, one may regard oneself as a patient and thus generate a feeling of shame and it is hard for people to truly relax and talk under this kind of emotion. There are also other activities aiming to raise awareness of anti-LGBTQ harassment and assault such as the National Day of Silence which is sponsored and promoted by GLSEN. The National Day of Silence is intended to grant students to change anti-LGBTQ harassment or bias in their school (Woolley, 2012).

There is also another helpful program called "Safe Zone" which is enacted in North America intended to prepare individuals in school (students, staff, faculty) to provide help to LGBTQ individuals (Draughn et al., 2002; Woodford et al., 2014). Individuals who finished Safe Zone training demonstrate some kind of placard indicating that they can be seen as a "safe" person with whom to discuss LGBTQ issues (Draughn et al., 2002).

Apart from all the aforementioned programs, I think school administrators should also enact supportive policies to help LGBTQ students as a study shows that anti-bullying policies provide necessary support for schools to create a supportive and safe school climate for LGBTQ students (Russell & McGuire, 2008). When students are in schools with anti-bullying policies, LGBTQ students are less likely to hear "gay" used in a negative way or other homophobic remarks such as "dyke" or "fag." They are also less likely to hear negative sentences about sexual orientation and gender expression and they report a higher level of

school personnel intervention when victimization occurs (Kosciw et al., 2015).

It seems that all the aforementioned programs which are intended to help LGBTQ youth focus on creating a positive school climate in order to reduce the occurrence of verbal abuse and physical harassment against LGBTQ youth. It is undeniable that this is a right direction to follow, but when the absence of harassment and bullying serves as the indicator of a positive, inclusive and safe school climates, we fail to take "the social environment that underpins this kind of homophobic bullying and the ways in which schools complicit in supporting them" into consideration (DePalma & Jennett, 2010, p. 53). What should be done is to recognize how this kind of homophobic bullying actually reflects our cultural norms for gender and sexuality expression. Bullying towards LGBTQ groups is symptomatic of a larger school atmosphere of heteronormativity in school policy, pedagogy, and curricula which are often overlooked by schools. The heteronormative culture prevents LGBTQ adolescents and their family from adapting to school communities and getting access to quality education (Schmidt, 2010). Schools are always a place that normalize and enforce heterosexuality (Dohei, 2016). The silence of LGBTQ voices, the absence of LGBTQ issues and figures in the curriculum, the pathologization of homosexuality and the monitoring of gender binaries contribute to the normalization and enforcement of heterosexuality. In order to address this systematic exclusion and its detrimental influence requires a disruption of how schools function to reproduce restricted gender boundaries. A research suggests that the first step to take is the acknowledgment of the existence of this normalcy (Meiners & Quinn, 2012). According to the above information, only focusing on the bullying behaviors themselves and

trying hard to prevent these from happening can just address the symptoms rather than the fundamental causes.

I think it is of great importance for researchers to figure out the underlying motivation for these bullying and harassment. Although there is evidence suggest young people actually know the negative influences that may result from homophobic language, research also shows that young people all over the world continue to suffer from the homophobic language at extremely high rates (Hillier et al., 2010; Horn, Peter, & Russell, 2016). What is more, LGBTQ's peers are frequent perpetrators of the use of homophobic language (Hill & Kearl, 2011; Hillier et al., 2010). However, little is known about why they use it. Figuring out the underlying motivation will help educators to prevent this type of language and thus reduce the negative consequences of them. A report shows that 33% to 50% of perpetrators say that they harass someone because they do not think it is serious or even think it is funny while 23% of perpetrators say that they get back at the person for something they did (Hill & Kearl, 2011). A report suggests that norms related to sexuality and gender may influence youth's interpretation and perpetration of these types of harassment. The social and cultural construction of gender underlies our understanding of the social norms attributed to gender roles including interpersonal action and personal characteristics (Butler, 1990). The language we used to represent gender is related to our interpretation of proper sexual behaviors and identities for male and female (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003).

Culture change is advocated by some researchers (Wickens, 2011; Paune & Smith, 2012). They argued that culture put lines between "abnormal" and "normal" and these lines

function as tools for individuals to place others and self into different social hierarchies. Culture establishes the boundaries that define what is a proper gender expression. Schools should recognize the cultural beliefs they are advocating, in which ways they are teaching these beliefs to their students, and how students-to-students aggression actually reflects these beliefs. Sustainable change only occurs when we are aware of our cultural beliefs (Wickens, 2011; Paune & Smith, 2012).

LGBTQ Literature—Help People Know More about LGBTQ Groups

Many authors of LGBTQ young adult literature seek to enhance inclusion of LGBTQ individuals and to manifest LGBTQ characteristics in a positive way. To do so, they often create homophobic situations and characters that provide a sense of realism (Crisp, 2009). One LGBTQ novel called *Boy meets Boy* undermines heteronormative assumptions by demonstrating the unthinkable: "Children as sexual beings, hegemonic masculinity as in fact non-hegemonic and detrimental to success, and homosexuality as normalized and even ordinary" (Wickens, 2011). Some characters in LGBTQ young adult literature seem to suffer from endless abuse and harassment for being LGBTQ, being "perverted" and "deviant," or even a friend of someone who is LGBTQ. However, they finally refuse to remain silent and remain victims after knowing their legal rights. Then readers may also come to question the injustice and stereotype against LGBTQ (Reynolds, 2001; Wickens, 2011).

In some novels such as *Love Rules, Keeping You a Secret,* homosexuality is regarded as perverted and deviant. Heterosexuality is "normal" and "natural" while "homosexuality" is "abnormal" and "unnatural." There are also other collocations with homosexuality, like

"disease," "virus," "sick," and "sin" (Reynolds, 2001; Peter, 2003). While these collocations are intended to create a sense of realism, as they bring into this larger homophobic environment, the literature themselves try hard to seek to challenge the "normalcy of heterosexuality as compared to homosexuality" (Crisp, 2009; Wickens, 2011).

The LGBTQ young adult literature indicate that the hegemony of heteronormativity forced LGBTQ groups to establish their own linguistic "codes" which function as the password to their own secret world which is free from distrusted outsiders. Roundabout phrases and metaphors are used by LGBTQ groups to communicate within their own "community." The use of these "coded languages" in LGBTQ literature actually demonstrated that LGBTQ groups fear being discovered because they are afraid of losing their friends and relatives. The book *Geography Club* (Hartinger, 2003) tells a story of some LGBTQ youth who establish a club called Geography Club where they can gather at school without being discovered (because the name of this club sounds so boring that no one else would have inclinations to participate). As such, the name "geography club" becomes a coded language "underscoring homosexuality as the love that dare not speak its name" (Wickens, 2011).

Much LGBTQ literature write about the discourses around LGBTQ that position it as a negative existence. The primary purpose of writing this is to provide a "real world" faced by LGBTQ groups to readers, and the final purpose is to challenge this discourse and urge readers to reflect on LGBTQ issues.

I also read some Chinese LGBTQ novels to have a deeper understanding of LGBTQ literature. There is one section in the book *But You Are Falling Love with An Idiot* written by

Shuiqiancheng: Sui Ying is a man with a prominent family background who is well known within the upper class of Beijing and he also runs a very successful business corporation on his own. One day he suffered from some unpleasant things so he went to a gay bar to drink and relax, and some local bullies who know Sui Ying as a son of a noble family teased him as a “faggot.” We can see from much LGBTQ literature that no matter what kind of achievements one has attained, if he or she is homosexual, then "LGBTQ" becomes the only label for him or her. All the other things done by them will be ignored and it seems that anyone can have the superiority to look down on them and tease them only because of their sexual orientations.

To sum up, LGBTQ literature serves as a useful channel to introduce the real life as well as some basic knowledge of LGBTQ groups intended to help the public have a better understanding of LGBTQ groups and to reflect a little bit more on LGBTQ issues.

Other Issues

Most of the literature on LGBTQ issues take LGBTQ as a whole groups to analyze their difficulties and challenges as well as possible solutions. There is limited literature that goes deeper into the various subgroups under the broader LGBTQ category. A study shows that LGBTQ youth are not homogenous groups in terms of their educational and psychological experiences (Robinson & Espelage, 2011). I assume that this is an important field which needs further research and more focus.

Apart from this, almost all the literature I found focuses primarily on the school life of LGBTQ youth without mentioning any detail of their family life. I think one of the most

important issues encountered by LGBTQ individuals is the "coming out" issue (meaning that they admit their sexual orientation publicly). I strongly believe that the family life of LGBTQ groups is a very significant section to explore.

Research related to LGBTQ young adults novels and materials are very limited. A study which is conducted in 125 high schools in a southern U.S. state shows that school libraries' collection of LGBTQ-themed titles are disproportionate compared with the percentage of LGBTQ students in schools (0.4% vs. 5.9%). Alexander (2007) points out that school libraries are "the most important information source" for LGBTQ students. As per this saying, research which is conducted on the school libraries' materials and books for LGBTQ groups should be enlarged.

As has been mentioned in the second part, LGBTQ adolescents are more likely to expose to additional stressors compared to their heterosexual peers (D' Augelli, 2002). They are more likely to suffer from both physical and verbal abuse by their classmates and their parents (Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & Durant, 1998; Harry, 1989). What is more, many LGBTQ adolescents live in contexts without support. They feel stressed because they are afraid that their sexual orientation will get disclosed one day (D' Augelli, 2002). Over 40% percent of LGBTQ adolescents lost a friend after telling out their sexual orientation (Remafedi, 1987). It is clear that supports and services provided for LGBTQ adolescents need to be increased in school to address the aforementioned troubling situation. However, a study suggested that the rate LGBTQ youth use services are far lower than their heterosexual peers (Doueck & Maccio, 2002). The service underutilization of LGBTQ adolescents

suggests that the existing school services may not fit the needs and contexts of LGBTQ youth (Acevedo-polakovich, Bell, Gamache, & Christian, 2011).

After presenting the difficulties encountered by LGBTQ students in education and showing the status quo in helping LGBTQ students as well as suggesting some confusions I meet in doing the research, I will then try to provide some solutions to the LGBTQ existing issues.

Chapter 3 — Solutions

As has been mentioned in chapters 1 and 2, LGBTQ people have been walking into the public's eyes for many years because of a more civilized world which pays greater attention to multiculturalism and minority rights as well as educational equality. My project focuses mainly on North American LGBTQ adolescents' encountering in schools. A study shows that although almost all the youth suffer from a certain degree of emotional, physical, psychological and social changes during adolescence, LGBTQ youth are more likely to be exposed to many additional stressors (D' Augelli, 2002). LGBTQ youth are at higher risk to be threatened or victimized in school and more likely to receive physical abuse from their parents (Garofalo, Wolf, Kessel, Palfrey, & DuRant, 1998; Harry, 1989). What is more, many LGBTQ adolescents live in an environment without support. They suffer from the abuse from classmates and school staff (Kosciw, 2015).

This non-supportive context for LGBTQ youth helps explain why LGBTQ youth are at higher risk for many physical and psychological problems compared to their heterosexual peers (Acevedo-Polakovich, Bell, Gamache, & Chrisitian, 2011). LGBTQ youth are at higher risk to abuse substances, experience psychological problems, leave school without permission, become homeless, committing suicide and drop out of school (Stroul, 2007).

Measures are adopted by schools and administrators to address this challenging landscape for LGBTQ students such as holding programs like gay-straight alliances. Anti-bullying policies are also set to combat the physical and verbal harassment exerted to LGBTQ students by their classmates or families. One research suggests that the most

common solutions taken by schools are anti-bullying policies and education designed to prevent the emotional and physical violence which influences LGBTQ youth (Schmidt, 2010).

However, just as I have mentioned in chapter 2, these programs and policies can just address the symptoms rather than the fundamental causes of bullying towards LGBTQ youth. We fail to recognize that bullying towards LGBTQ youth actually reflects our larger culture of heteronormativity. This heteronormativity is filled with our lives from an early age and we almost always neglect that because we are so accustomed to it. Heteronormativity lies in school pedagogy, curricula and social structures that schools tend to neglect.

Most of the literature I used in doing my project are empirical studies. They adopt a large quantity of data and analyze them systematically to draw conclusions. Some of the literature also use case study and discursive analysis as well as ethnography.

Service Accessibilities for LGBTQ Students

As has been mentioned in the last part of chapter 2, service use among LGBTQ youth is disproportionately low. It is suggested that the reduced service accessibility plays a significant role in service underutilization among LGBTQ adolescents. Accessibility refers to individual's personalities that facilitate them to use and navigate needed service and supports (Hernandez, Nesman, Mowery, Acevedo-Polakovich, & Callejas, 2009). A study shows four levels of service accessibility barriers: i.e., societal, provider-related, youth-related, and resource-related. This four levels of service accessibility barriers can be further divided into 30 specific barriers, such as LGBTQ youth lack acceptance from parents, society, and peers

(belongs to societal barriers). LGBTQ youth are concerned about their emotional, physical and psychological safety (belongs to youth-related barriers). LGBTQ youth are facing financial issues (belongs to resource-related barriers). LGBTQ youth are required to "come out" to access services (belongs to provider-related barriers). The study also identifies specific strategies to address these barriers, such as: allowing LGBTQ youth to receive services without parental consent, maintain the confidentiality of LGBTQ youth who get access to the service, allow LGBTQ youth to contribute to the consulting program (Acevedo-polakovich, Bell, Gamache, & Christian, 2011).

I suppose it is important to note that the four levels of barriers encountered by LGBTQ youth in getting access to services are interrelated. For instance, parental consent is required to receive service (provider-related) results in decreased accessibility because many LGBTQ youth are not accepted by their families (societal-related), which in turn leads LGBTQ youth to be afraid of their physical and psychological safety (youth-related) (Acevedo-Polakovich, Bell, Gamache, & Christian, 2011). The factors influence service accessibility among LGBTQ adolescents are complicated and multilayered thus it is better to make relations between factors to address the underutilization issue.

As has been mentioned in Chapter 2, some studies indicate that school staff has insufficient preparation and knowledge to work effectively with LGBTQ students (Savage, Prout, & Chard, 2004; Whitman, Horn, & Boyd, 2007). Some research suggest that LGBTQ topics are seldom incorporated into formal school curriculum (Crocco, 2008; Griffin & Ouellett, 2003; Sadowski, 2008; Thornton, 2002, 2003). It is clear that supports and services

provided for LGBTQ adolescents need to be increased in school to address the aforementioned troubling situation. The service underutilization of LGBTQ adolescents suggests that the existing school services may not fit the needs and contexts of LGBTQ youth (Acevedo-Polakovich, Bell, Gamache, & Christian, 2011). According to the aforementioned evidence, I think there is a great need to train school counselors and teachers as well as provide LGBTQ inclusive curriculum to combat the difficulties encountered by LGBTQ students and provide a safe and supportive school climate for them.

The Need to Train School Counselors

As far as I am concerned, societal factors which affect LGBTQ youth's access to services are too big a field which needs great contributions from LGBTQ youth's parents, their heterosexual peers, and educators as well as themselves. What schools can do now in addressing this issue is to treat school counselors as a tower of strength to further let other parties such as parents, school personnel have a better understanding of LGBTQ youth. It is high time that school trained the school counselors properly because many studies have found that LGBTQ youth identify school counselors as the most comfortable administrator to talk about their LGBTQ identity (Hall, McDougai, & Kressica, 2013; Kosciw et al., 2016). However, just as scholars have argued, school counselors may lack the appropriate training required to implement counseling services in schools (Akos, Goodnough, & Milsom, 2004; Paisley & Milsom, 2007; Steen, Bauman, & Smith, 2008).

School counselors can help LGBTQ youth in many ways. I assume that the first thing school counselors need to do is to dispel the common myths and misunderstandings

around LGBTQ youth on public occasions in school. Some of these myths should be remembered firmly in counselors' heart, such as parents must be informed of their children's sexual orientation and gender identity. A study suggests that linking parents with schools and creating partnerships can improve struggling students' academic and psychological well-being (Griffin & Steen, 2010). However, school counselors should be careful when discussing any student's sexual orientation and gender identity with their parents without letting the student know first. Sometimes this will cause a detrimental effect on LGBTQ youth if they have not disclosed their sexual orientation and their parents reject this kind of disclosure. Although parents' participation plays significant roles in students' well-being, it also generates risks when students' sexual orientation and gender identity are disclosed to parents who do not accept, thus, potentially lead to an unsafe home environment for LGBTQ youth (Bouris et al., 2010). I suggest it is better to keep LGBTQ students' sexual orientation and gender identity as a secret between students themselves and counselors when students are not ready to talk it with their parents. I think schools should let LGBTQ youth get access to services provided by counselors without parents consent thus LGBTQ youth can feel more free and safe to use the service. A good way to increase school counselors' knowledge of LGBTQ youth is to match them with GSA student groups. They can pair up with GSA students and held meetings every week to better serve LGBTQ students.

LGBTQ Topics

Just as I have mentioned in the second chapter, LGBTQ topic inclusion in the classroom should always be an important point to give attention to. Incorporating LGBTQ

topics into the curriculum is a matter of multiculturalism and educational equality. However, the field of education does little to solve the issue that LGBTQ topics should be incorporated into school curriculum (Schmidt, 2010). A study suggests that sexuality education in school is taught from a heterosexual perspective that excludes LGBTQ students as well as heterosexual students who do not behave like what is defined as "heterosexual" by culture (Elia, Eliason, 2010). However, dissidents suggest that school do not actually teach heterosexuality, so neither should they teach homosexuality (Sax, 2005). Some theorists believe that (hetero)sexuality is indeed "schooled" (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Ferfolja, 2007; mac an Ghaill, 1994). For instance, mac an Ghaill (1994) shows how teachers, school curricula provide a unitary definition of woman and man while knowing that few students cling to a single category. Heterosexuality is compulsory—it is the only choice to make (Rich, 1986). "In schools as spaces of heterosexual identity formation, LGBTQ youth learn to police their identities" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 89). School is an environment that justifies heteronormativity in curricula, pedagogy, and policy. For instance, the showcase of first ladies supporting their husbands reiterates acceptable ways to perform one's sexuality. Students read and understand the sexual teaching of schools through the curriculum and social activities. The curriculum, school policies and other social content of schools teach students "the only" acceptable ways to behave themselves as to gender expression and thus limit students' gender and sexual imagination (Schmidt, 2010).

In order to understand what frames LGBTQ issues and identities, researchers refer to the queer theory which identifies how the categories of LGBTQ came into being and how

they influence the way in which people act and be identified (Schmidt, 2010). Queer theory questions how behaviors of sexuality are normalized. Queer theorists argue that the generation of standards and criteria of sexuality regulates identity and behavior (Britzman, 1995; Butler, 2004; Dilley, 1999). When a term like heterosexual receives a set of attributes that define what is socially acceptable, standard arises. Heterosexual is no longer a word that refers to sexual orientation, but a concept imbued with a series of "normal" characteristics that enable individuals to monitor and evaluate themselves and others (Schmidt, 2010). The use of binaries to make differences between heterosexual and LGBTQ people means the overlap between these identities and categories are not accounted for and represented.

Teacher Reluctance

As I have mentioned in Chapter 2, some teachers feel reluctant to incorporate LGBTQ issues into their curricula because they are afraid of what other students might say will hurt LGBTQ students feeling. This kind of hatred and unkind attitudes toward LGBTQ groups can be concluded as "homophobia." One's struggling with the boundaries and categories of sexuality and gender can explain this hatred from psychological perspectives. One must maintain one's masculinity or femininity and their inherent heterosexuality by condemned anything that trying to challenge it (Kimmel, 2000). The homophobic expression reiterates boundaries around woman and man and humiliate anyone who dares to challenge it. Researchers find that there is an absence of proper representations of LGBTQ people in schools (Avery, 2002; Crocco, 2002; Thornton, 2002).

While there is a negative presence of LGBTQ people outside school, there is no

representation of LGBTQ issues and people in the specific curriculum (Schmidt, 2010). Researchers try to find out curriculum contents which are related to gender roles, but they end up finding a woman is always related to her husband whenever she is mentioned in the curriculum. However, there is no sign of LGBTQ people in the curriculum does not mean sexuality is not taught in the curriculum. Heteronormativity and homophobia underlie the school environment, so sexuality is a great part of the curriculum (Schmidt, 2010).

The study reflects one of the challenges in incorporating LGBTQ topic into the curriculum is that school always tries to erase the homophobic and heteronormative school environment while reinforcing them. For instance, while teaching LGBTQ topic challenges what is accepted by the culture in terms of sexuality, teaching them as uncomfortable and exceptional reiterate LGBTQ issues as marginalized and lead to the discussion of whether LGBTQ issues are legitimate inclusion (Bickmore, 2002). Some researchers point out that there are five continua of sexuality education: "no sexuality at all, abstinence-only, abstinence-based, comprehensive, anti-oppressive "(Elia, Eliason, 2010, p. 93). There are four types of teachers dealing with LGBTQ topics: avoiders, hesitators, confronters and integrators (Zack, Mannheim, & Alfano, 2010). Not teaching LGBTQ- related sexuality means LGBTQ youth cannot find their positions in reading and learning course even in delivering their opinions.

I assume educators need to pay more attention to the creating of greater tolerance of LGBTQ students in the whole cultural environment of schools. Several researchers suggest greater recognition and inclusion of LGBTQ persons and identities (Crocco, 2002; Levstik &

Groth,2002; Thorton, 2002).

My ultimate goal for training teachers and school counselors is let them have a better understanding of LGBTQ youth and thus create a good school climate for them. Before the workshops, I suggest school teachers and counselors shoot a video clips showing their understandings and attitudes towards LGBTQ youth by telling their comprehension of this groups and after the workshops, they watch the video clips again and correct their own misunderstandings or add to their limited understandings. My plans are as follows:

Proposed Workshops

There are 5 workshops in total aiming to help school teachers and counselors have a deeper understanding of LGBTQ students in order to better serve them. The workshops start at a relatively shallow level and end up in a more complicated and multi-layered level. The 5 workshops will first introduce some "superficial" statistics of incidents around LGBTQ people and then go deeper to discover the underlying cause of these "superficial" phenomena while providing useful methods and information for teachers and counselors to settle the daily issues which is related with LGBTQ groups.

The first workshop. Place: School meeting room. Length: 2 hours. Participants: School teachers and counselors. Contents: Inviting school counselors and teachers to explore basic statistics and realities about LGBTQ youth together and examine marginalization, language and think of methods to be responsible for LGBTQ youth in schools. Provide the latest 2015 school climate survey (the survey is conducted every two years and the results of 2017 school climate survey will not be released until 2018 fall) conducted by GLSEN as a

supplement material for teachers and counselors to understand the specific difficulties encountered by LGBTQ youth. Visiting the GLSEN website to check the school climate survey report of previous years. Using a summative report to discuss in the meeting. Teachers and counselors can read the full report after the meeting.

Website address: https://www.glsen.org/

The second workshop. Place: Meeting room. Length: 2 hours. Participants: School teachers, counselors and local specialist. Contents: Local specialist talks about the common myths and misunderstandings around LGBTQ youth. Deepen counselors' and teachers' understanding of homophobia and transphobia. Using articles written by Kosciw (2016) such as "International Perspectives on Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in Schools" from Journal of LGBTQ youth (formerly known as Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education) to fully understand the situation. This journal has one volume every year. Under each volume, there are 4 issues.

Links: https://www-tandfonline-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/toc/wjly20/current.

The third workshop. Place: School meeting room. Length: 2.5 hours. Participants: school teachers, counselors. Contents: Using a website such as study.com to understand the definitions and origins of heteronormativity. Discussing seminal writings such as "Introduction: fear of a queer planet" (Warner, 1991) and "compulsory heterosexuality and lesbian existence" (Rich, 1980). Introducing LGBTQ experts such as V. Paul Poteat, Dorothy L. Espelage, and Brian W. Koenig to explore methods to help LGBTQ youth, use website such as www.aqueerendeavour.org. The brief introduction of these three experts are listed as

follows:

Table 1

General Information of Experts

V. Paul Poteat, PhD, is Assistant Professor of Counseling, Developmental, and Educational Psychology at Boston University. His research examines homophobic and other forms of bias-based bullying; mental health and resilience of LGBT youth; and social norms and ideology beliefs connected to homophobic attitudes and behaviors.

Dorothy L. Espelage, PhD, is Professor of Child Development at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Conducting research on bullying for 20 years, her current research examines correlates of sexual harassment, dating violence, and homophobic teasing.

Brian W. Koenig, MA, is owner of K12 Associates, Middleton, WI. As a writer, trainer, and consultant, he works with school districts to create safe, welcoming climates. He is the author of *Creating a Climate of Respect* and has collaborated on numerous articles on bullying and bully prevention.

Website: https://study.com/academy/lesson/heteronormativity-definition-concept.html

Writing links: http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/466295;

https://muse-jhu-edu.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/article/48874

The fourth workshop. Place: School auditorium. Length: 2 hours. Participants: School teachers, counselors and Expert Russell S. T. Contents: Teaching counselors and teachers to interrupt any hate speech or pejorative languages around LGBTQ youth once hear them. Inviting experts on LGBTQ issues such as Russell S. T. to explore teachable moments with teachers and counselors. For instance: If a child talking about her parents of the same sex, a child says "that' so gay" and think it as something "weird" and "abnormal," or some children behave in a way that does not traditionally match his or her biological sex, then counselors and teachers should teach at that moment and not avoid these situations. Teachers and counselors should realize that students not always live in traditional families and should

explore different types of guardianships. I suggest teachers and counselors should grasp these teachable moments and answer students' doubts about LGBTQ issues directly. Handouts with classroom scenarios will be provided to teachers and counselors for the analysis and discussion of teachable moments. These handouts are designed by the guest expert Russell S. T. Counselors and teachers should work together and used the learned information to select some young adults literature that aligns with the lessons taught which help students to better understand LGBTQ groups. Held a sharing class for students to share their understanding of the books. I suggest teachers and counselors select literature that challenges presupposed assumption (such as challenging heteronormativity) and enable students to think critically. Some recommended literature is listed below:

Table 2

Recommended LGBTQ Young Adult Fiction (Wagaman, 2011).

Title	Recommended
Chbosky, Stephen. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999)	Webber, YALSA BBYA, Senior High Core Collection
Wittlinger, Ellen. *Hard Love* (1999)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, Printz Award, SLJ Best Books, YALSA BBYA, Senior High Core Collection
Freymann-Weyr, Garret. *My Heartbeat* (2002)	Webber, Printz Award, SLJ Best Books, YALSA BBYA, Senior High Core Collection
Garden, Nancy. *Annie on My Mind* (1982, 1991, 1992, 2007)	Webber, YALSA BBYA, Senior High Core Collection
Hartinger, Brent. *Geography Club* (2003)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, Senior High Core Collection
Levithan, David. *Boy Meets Boy* (2005)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, YALSA BBYA
Peters, Julie Ann. *Luna* (2004)	Webber, Rainbow List, Senior High Core Collection
Bauer, Marion Dane. *Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence* (1994)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, YALSA BBYA, Senior High Core Collection
Sanchez, Alex. *Rainbow Boys* (2001)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, YALSA BBYA, Senior High Core Collection
Ryan, Sara. *Empress of the World* (2001)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, YALSA BBYA
St. James, James. *Freak Show* (2007)	Webber, Rainbow List, Lambda Literary Award, YALSA BBYA, SLJ Best Books
Howe, James. *The Misfits* (2001)	Webber
Burd, Nick. *The Vast Fields of Ordinary* (2009)	Webber, Rainbow List, Lambda Literary Award, Stonewall Award
Wittlinger, Ellen. *Parrotfish* (2007)	Webber, Lambda Literary Award, Senior High Core Collection
Dole, Mayra Lazara. *Down to the Bone* (2008)	Webber, Rainbow List, Senior High Core Collection

Table 3

Recommended LGBTQ Young Adult Non-fiction (Wagaman, 2011).

Title
Alsenas, Linas. *Gay America: Struggle for Equality* (2008)
Levithan, David, and Billy Merrell, eds. *The Full Spectrum: A New Generation of Writing about Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, and Other Identities* (2006)
Huegel, Kelly. *GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens* (2003)
Marcus, Eric. *Is It a Choice? Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions about Gay and Lesbian People* (1993, 1999, 2005)
St. Stephen's Community House. *The Little Black Book for Guys: Guys Talk About Sex* (2008)
St. Stephen's Community House. *The Little Black Book for Girlz: A Book on Healthy Sexuality* (2006)

The fifth workshop. Place: meeting room. Length: 2 hours. Participants: School administrators, teachers, counselors of several schools and student representatives from GSA. Content: School counselors and teachers should work with students from gay-straight alliances (held meetings every two weeks) to actually understand LGBTQ youth's struggles and encountering as well as support and promote this alliance from the perspective of educators. In order to build a whole-community model and look beyond counselors and teachers to create a larger safer environment, school administrators should bring teachers and counselors of different schools together to share their working experiences in relation to LGBTQ youth, thus teachers and counselors can look beyond their current situations and explore more information as to what promotes or constrains their efforts.

Through attending these 5 workshops, I believe that school counselors and teachers can learn a great deal in helping LGBTQ students. They should know the status quo of

LGBTQ youth and the difficulties they encounter after attending these workshops. They should also know how to intervene with homophobic bullying and victimization towards LGBTQ youth at school. The most important is that they begin to bear the consciousness that they should pay attention to LGBTQ issues in their teaching process. I will then reflect on my project and write down the things I learned through doing this project.

Chapter 4 — Reflections

Limitations do exist because of the method I used to do my project. I read literature on LGBTQ youth issues in education and divide the contents of these articles into several sections according to the categories I made to detail LGBTQ topic. Through analyzing and comparing information and statistics of each literature, I begin to know the basic status quo of North American LGBTQ youth in the educational field and then I provide my own solutions to the existing problems in this field.

I learned a lot by doing my project. I get to know several research methods such as empirical study, case study and I have a general understanding of their advantages and limitations. In order to do better in the literature part of my project, I read an article called "Working with Literature" (Russell, 2011).

When reading the article Working with Literature, I found a useful idea that provokes my interests in working with literature review: that is, to map the field—sorting literature into identifiable groups, with each groups addressing a similar aspect of the relevant topic. I do think it is a beneficial way to organize my thoughts, so I followed this notion to make a general classification of the resources available. My research topic falls in the area of LGBTQ issues and I used keywords "LGBTQ," "homosexuality," "program," "curriculum," and "anti-bullying" to search for the related materials about my research topic in ERIC database and the electronic library of China's Academy of Social Sciences. I then have an extensive reading of these materials in order to divide them into five different clumps, the five categories are listed as follows: LGBTQ identities and falsehood, LGBTQ issues in the

educational field, attempts made to help LGBTQ youth, barriers encountered by educators in helping LGBTQ youth, LGBTQ literature.

I come to realize that the reader-examiner of a literature review is not checking to see if the researcher has read everything. They are checking to see whether they have read sufficiently—checking to see if the references are technically correct. It is suggested in this article that the literature is not a monolith; it is plural. They include a range of texts—policy documents, professional reading as well as books and journal articles that are 'scholarly'. In some instances, the range may even include novels, films, and cartoons. The above idea provides a kind of new thoughts to me when deciding what kind of texts to be included in my literature review. I start to emphasize a lot on the LGBTQ young adult literature and I found out very important facts around LGBTQ issues. One of the LGBTQ novels called “Boy Meets Boy” undermines heteronormative assumptions by demonstrating the unthinkable: "Children as sexual beings, hegemonic masculinity as in fact non-hegemonic and detrimental to success, and homosexuality as normalized and even ordinary" (Wickens, 2011, p. 42).

Other relative paragraphs also give me lots of inspiration: In some novels such as *Love Rules* and *Keeping You a Secret*, homosexuality is regarded as pervert, deviant. Heterosexuality is normal and natural while homosexuality is abnormal and unnatural. There are also other collocations with homosexuality, like "disease," "virus," "sick," and "sin" (Reynolds, 2001; Peter, 2003). While these collocations are intended to create a sense of realism, as they bring into this larger homophobic environment, the literature themselves try hard to seek to challenge the "normalcy of heterosexuality as compared to homosexuality"

(Crisp, 2009; Wickens, 2011).

Literature comprises a field or fields of knowledge production. The aim of reading the literature is to make sure what is known about a particular research topic. What needs to be done by us is "to sort, sift, foreground and background the field" (Russell, 2011, p. 32).

Another method which applied in some of the literature I read is case study. I used to make fun of case study. As far as I am concerned, case study is not a study at all because of its limited quantities of study subjects. I used to think that researchers choose to do case study because it consumes less time and human resources. But now I know that case study has its unique strength. I laughed at case study because of its coverage, but I neglected its great advantage in terms of its depth.

I looked into a case study research in my LGBTQ issues. This case study focuses on the method: the interview. This article displays several interview paragraphs and they really bring me into the real interview situation. Through reading these paragraphs, I find I can really understand the hardship of these 15 teachers when considering whether or not to incorporate LGBTQ topics into their classroom. Other empirical studies will not provide us with the opportunity to know the details of each situation, thus the only thing we gain is general statistics.

Case study lets me know that "observation" and "interview" can be a study method. I used to think stuff that related to research or study must be things that are boring and academic. “Observation" and "interview" are just too "daily life" to be a part of a research. Case study puts emphasis on each case which is just a part of our everyday life. It makes

research become closer to our life.

When I read the case study in my own study field, I find that many minor and subtle details contribute to a final result. We have to pay attention to the phenomenon/action/behavior itself, and we should also pay attention to things that beyond it. We should see both the direct cause and the primary cause of one single phenomenon. There are no definite boundaries for case study, although we draw an artificial boundary aiming to help us find out our research focus, but in real life, the fact is that all phenomena are intertwined. I guess we can just find a vague scope.

If I were to conduct a case study on my own research topic, I would definitely choose several cases that would compare and contrast with others. I do think by doing a case study, the researcher can establish a kind of friendly relationship with the people being researched because the interview conducted by researcher will develop into a deep-going conversation which will reveal more things than what is required by the researcher.

Other limitations exist due to my limited capability to find out useful literature. I failed to find out sufficient literature that reflects LGBTQ youth' situations in Canada. I also find that literature on LGBTQ youth mainly focus on the whole LGBTQ groups but fail to give consideration to each subgroups under the LGBTQ umbrella identity. Studies show that LGBTQ are not homogenous groups in terms of educational and psychological experience. I think more research is needed in figuring out the heterogeneity of LGBTQ youth. Apart from this, almost all the literature I find focus on the school life of LGBTQ youth. I suggest that research related to LGBTQ youth's family life should be conducted to further help

researchers to have a comprehensive understanding of LGBTQ youth.

LGBTQ are minority groups which society should pay great attention to because they are deprived of many basic rights. I think the civilization degree of a country depends on how it treats its minority groups. To protect the right of the minority is to protect the right of the majority. The first step of protecting minority rights is to realize and admit the disparities between minority groups and majority groups. As long as we bear this consciousness in our mind, we will finally make it there.

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